Best Time of Day for Literacy Instruction

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Abstract

Introduction

In New York students are assessed on their ability to read and write through a standardized test known as the New York State English Language Arts test (ELA). With the advent of the ELA test, teachers and schools have felt increased pressure to help students do well on these tests as their scores are pivotal to the reputations and ratings of schools. To try to ensure students improve in reading, many schools in New York now devote the first 90 minutes of the school day to “literacy blocks” for reading instruction in which students must complete independent reading, participate in personal conferences with the teacher, and learn reading and writing strategies.

In 2010 the statewide ELA test results showed that across grades three to eight only 53% of students showed competency in English by having met or exceeded the state’s proficiency standards.[[1]](#footnote-1) Although this number shows a majority, it still shows that a great number of students are lacking necessary reading and writing skills. As these scores reflect a lack of literacy in a large number of New York school children, it may be necessary to rethink the approach to reading instruction in order to show significant gains in reading scores, and to help the children.

One major factor in reading instruction that may need to be addressed is the time of day at which reading is taught. The time of day at which children are instructed in reading may affect how they learn, and can be a hindrance to their understanding and absorption of the material presented to them (Ammons, Booker, & Killmon, 1995; Barron, Henderson, & Spurgeon, 1994; Bloom, 2007; Borchetta & Dunn, 2010; Braio, Beasley, Dunn, Quinn, & Buchanan, 1997; Carbo, 2009; Davis, 2001; Lovelace, 2005; Robinson, 2004). Researchers and theorists have sought to address the problem of when is the best time for children to learn, and have come up with various results.

Some researchers and theorists argue that children have their own personal best times to learn as each individual has specific and unique learning style preferences that need to be addressed and catered to by instruction methods (Ammons, Booker, & Killmon, 1995; Beck, 2001; Borchetta &Dunn, 2010; Braio, Beasley, Dunn, Quinn, & Buchanan, 1997; Carbo, 2009; Cropper, 1994; Doolan & Honigsfeld, 2000; Dunn, 1984; Dunn, 1998; Haar, Hall, Schoepp, & Smith, 2002; Hodgin & Wooliscroft, 1997; Lauria, 2010; Lovelace, 2005; Neely & Alm, 1992; Pitts, 2009). Other researchers have challenged this notion citing that the research behind the learning styles methods is flawed, vague, and subjective (Curry, 1990; Dembo & Howard, 2007; Ivie, 2009; Kavale & LeFever, 2007; Stahl, 1999). There are also those researchers that have conducted studies that yielded results that show morning is the best time for children to learn (Robinson, 2004 ), while others have conducted studies that yielded results that afternoon is the best time for children to learn (Barron, Henderson, & Spurgeon, 1994).

Statement of the Problem

At a private, urban school in Brooklyn, New York, reading and writing is taught earlier in the morning at 9’o clock, but many of the fifth-grade students there continue to struggle with word decoding and content comprehension, and read below grade level. If the time of literacy instruction for these students were moved to later in the day, specifically the afternoon, would their reading comprehension and decoding skills improve?

Review of Related Literature

Many adults can describe themselves as “morning people,” “afternoon people,” or “night people,” as they judge that they have specific times of the day they prefer and tend to be more productive. It is with a similar rationale that theorists Rita and Kenneth Dunn developed the learning styles model for instruction. The Dunn and Dunn learning styles model is a theory for classroom instruction that identifies 21 key elements that affect students and their learning preferences (Braio, Beasley, Dunn, Quinn, & Buchanan, 1997). The elements in the Dunns’ model are environmental, emotional, sociological, and physical characteristic variables that each play a role to affect student learning (Dunn, 1984).

One important element in the learning styles model is the time of day at which instruction is given. Time is a physical characteristic that can positively or negatively impact a child’s grasp of material presented to him. In order to address this element, theorists and researchers suggest that time-of-day preference be considered and implemented in school scheduling in order to see significant gains in student classroom performance and on test scores (Ammons, Booker, & Killmon; Borchetta & Dunn, 2010; Carbo, 2009; Doolan & Honigsfeld, 2000; Dunn, 1984; Dunn, 1998; Hodgin & Wooliscroft, 1997).

Following this theory and model, schools have successfully implemented learning style model classrooms and schedules that show that the theory can be put into practice to help students. In a pilot program in Plymouth, England, students at four of the area’s primary schools were allowed to choose the time that best suited them to start school. Students who worked better in the morning began school at 7:45 a.m., while those who prefer to sleep late began school at 11 a.m. (Bloom, 2007). In a school-wide initiative at an elementary school in Aberdeen, South Dakota, teachers integrated aspects of the Dunn and Dunn learning styles model in their classrooms (Neely & Alm, 1992). This successful experiments can suggest that considering time-of-day preference can help students.

There are researchers who are against the learning styles models.

Statement of the Hypothesis

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Appendices

1. http://www.oms.nysed.gov/press/Grade3-8\_Results07282010.html [↑](#footnote-ref-1)